

Amendment would end America's fundamentally flawed, wasteful, and ineffective system of capital punishment

Washington, D.C. – Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN) today introduced [H.J.Res. 80](#)

, an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to end the use of the death penalty in the United States. Her action comes on the same day that a U.S. Supreme Court decision will likely restart executions in the United States after a six month hiatus, and as the most high-profile death penalty opponent in the world, Pope Benedict XVI, pays his first visit to America.

“Criminals who are found guilty of committing heinous acts should be sentenced to life in prison as a punishment and for the wellbeing of society,” McCollum said. She continued, “The death penalty, by contrast, does not serve society’s interests – it is damaging and harmful. Fighting crime, achieving justice, and elevating human dignity are all damaged by state-sponsored executions. We know the death penalty is more expensive to implement than regular sentences, it does not reduce crime, and it imposes a shared societal responsibility for killing another human being on behalf of a justice system that is clearly not perfect.”

America's system of capital punishment has been shown to be deeply flawed. Studies have found that racial bias severely distorts death penalty sentencing, with African Americans accounting for more than 40 percent of death row inmates. New legal research and forensic science have exonerated 128 death row inmates since 1973. Death penalty cases cost taxpayers millions more than imprisoning inmates for life without parole in maximum security prisons, but large majorities of criminal experts and law enforcement officials say that capital punishment does not deter violent crimes.

McCollum expressed hope that Pope Benedict would speak out about his moral opposition to capital punishment in meetings with high-level U.S. officials and during public appearances around the country. "The Supreme Court's decision today was painful for those of us who believe the death penalty is immoral. No one can respond with greater moral authority or spiritual wisdom on this subject than His Holiness."

The United States is one of five countries that carried out almost 90 percent of the world's executions in 2007 – the other four being China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. While the U.S. shares this distinction with some of the world's worst human rights abusers, more than 90 nations have legally abolished the death penalty and over 120 have abandoned it in practice.

"The U.S. should be ashamed to be in the company of countries like China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as the world's most prolific practitioners of execution," McCollum said. "I want America to be a beacon for human rights. A system of

capital punishment that is unfairly applied and allows the execution of the innocent is contrary to human rights standards and must be prohibited.”

Click the links below to view the text of Rep. McCollum’s proposed amendment and a fact sheet on U.S. capital punishment.